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ABSTRACT

State education reform efforts, like national proposals for educational excellence, have blamed poor schooling for widening the gulf between poor and rich and influencing economic and industrial decline. Improved schools will supposedly restore economic health to society and its individual citizens. This conflation of educational reform and economic revitalization has encouraged business leaders to shape policy strategies for educational reform as they do for their corporations, focusing on purpose and restructured work relationships. Better schools are frequently defined as those meeting the needs of business, as Lee A. Iacocca's syndicated column illustrates. Although educational policy analysts have criticized various components of the excellence movement, few have examined the underlying commitment to a corporate ethos and a factory organizational model. The rhetoric of empowering teachers and rewarding competency with higher pay and status masks structural changes which will undermine the conditions nurturing effective teaching. The old factory model has merely been replaced with a new manufacturing model that is equally incompatible with education's democratic purposes and is being challenged (even within factories) as a less humane workplace organization system. By allowing corporate leaders and ideology to dominate the national and state policy debates on educational reform, educators have won increased funding for schools and teacher salaries at the cost of further isolating education from its democratic goals and constituencies. (34 references) (MLH)

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THE 'TRIUMPH OF COMMERCIALISM':

THE CORPORATE ETHOS AND EDUCATIONAL REFORM

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ABSTRACT

While analysts of educational policies spawned by the "excellence movement" have criticized components of this wave of reform, few have examined the underlying commitment to a corporate ethos and a factory model of organization. Lois Weiner argues that the rhetoric of empowering teachers and rewarding competency with higher pay and status masks structural changes which will actually undermine the conditions which nurture effective teaching.

The major national proposals to restructure teaching and the state policy measures they have sparked emphatically reject the old factory model as outmoded, but they replace it with a new manufacturing model based on teams, which the author contends is no more compatible with education's democratic purposes and is being challenged even within factories as a less humane system for workplace organization.

In allowing corporate leaders and ideology to dominate the national and state policy debates on educational reform, teachers, their unions, and the educational establishment have won increased funding for schools and teacher salaries, but at the cost of further isolating education from its democratic goals and constituencies.

> Two ideals are struggling for supremacy in American life today: one the industrial ideal, culminating thru the supremacy of commercialism, which subordinates the worker to the product and the machine; the other, the ideal of democracy, the ideal of the educators, which places humanity above all machines, and demands that all activity be the expression of life. If this ideal of of the educators cannot be carried over into the industrial field, then the ideal of industrialism will be carried over into the school...If the school cannot bring joy to the work of the world, the joy must go out of its own life, and work in the school as in the factory will become drudgery (Margaret Haley, 1904, quoted in Hoffman, N. 1981, p. 294).

Most analysts agree that the states have indeed enacted a "bewildering array of policy initiatives" in this decade's wave of educational reform termed the excellence movement (Timar & Kirp, 1988, p. 13). But when these seemingly disconnected measures are analyzed in the context of American society's declining industrial base, shrinking job market, and increasing social inequality, they reveal a bold commitment to the "supremacy of commercialism" which Margaret Haley predicted was the inevitable consequence of educators failing to make the workplace and American society truly democratic.

For the most part, strategies and programs to reform education in the various states, like the national proposals for educational excellence, have been justified by the premise that poor schooling is responsible for the growing gulf between poor and rich, as well as economic and industrial decline. Hence, the

reasoning goes, improved schools will restore economic health to the society as a whole and to its individual citizens. This conflation of educational reform and economic revitalization has encouraged business leaders to shape policy strategies for educational reform as they do their corporations, starting with education's purpose and following through to the restructuring of work and work relationships in schools.

By framing the importance of educational reform in terms of economic resuscitation, educational and political leaders have invited those who control its economic institutions to direct schooling's improvement, even when explicit calls for assistance are not made. Lee A. Iacocca's syndicated column calling for business to take the lead in demanding better schools, defining better schools as those which meet the needs of business, illustrates the domination of the "industrial ideal" in educational policy:

> ...It's no secret that we aren't getting enough young people who are equipped to compete in the high-tech, global economy that we live in today... But giving money to education isn't enough...In a sense, the schools are our suppliers. They supply us with the most important and most expensive assets of all-our people. When you pay that much to any supplier, you've got a right, even a professional obligation, to make sure you're getting your money's worth...(1988)

Like many of the corporate and political leaders who have assumed a prominent role in educational reform, Iacocca has redefined schooling's "customers" as industry, rather than parents, students and community members. He appropriates authority for corporations to shape education, making the schools

corporate property rather than a democratic domain.

The economic rationale for educational reform is explicit in A Nation at Risk, which, it is generally agreed, focused public and political attention on education's deficiencies. This report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education (1981) grounded the need for quality education in economic, industrial and military danger to the nation. Warning that the "educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people," the report admonished that to retain world markets and a competitive edge, "we must dedicate ourselves to the reform of our educational system..."

While the degree of direct intervention by corporate and business leaders has varied from state to state, the imprimatur of the corporate ethos has been pervasive. For example, the Carnegie Task Force on Teaching as a Profession, like A Nation at Risk, bases its proposals for educational improvement on America's eroding ability to compete in world markets and the economy's increasingly problematic ability to provide a high standard of living.

> As jobs requiring little skill are automated or go offshore, and demand increases for the highly skilled, the pool of educated and skilled people grows smaller and the backwater of the unemployable rises...As in past economic and social crises, Americans turn to education. They rightly demand an improved supply of young people with the knowledge, the spirt, the stamina and the skills to make the nation once again fully competitive - in industry, in commerce, in social justice and progress, and, not least, in the ideas that safeguard a free society.(p. 2)

The ideas and language belong to business: schools are to provide an "improved supply of young people"; education must make "the nation once again fully competitive" economically, and in social justice as well, (although who competes against whom in social justice and how we can determine who has won are questions we are left to ponder on our own.) Later in its report, the Carnegie Task Force reiterates the urgency of its message by identifying its concerns with warnings from the Education Commission of the States' Task Force on Education and Economic Growth, the President's Commission on Industrial Competitiveness, and the National Alliance of Business. It discusses education as a financial investment with the need for "improving the rate of return" and "capturing the benefits of productivity" (p. 107).

Texas and California provide two examples of the different ways business leaders have shaped reform of public education in their states. To the extent that educational reform is framed as an economic initiative, the corporate sector commands a larger role in policy formation. Participants in the Texas reform effort reported to researchers that "political rhetoric about correcting the ills of public eduction was tied to business interests and accelerated when Texas first felt the effects of economic recession" (Shepard & Kreitzer, 1987). After Governor Mark White of Texas was unable to obtain a budget increase to fund a considerable pay increase for teachers, he appointed H. Ross Perot chairman of a blue-ribbon panel to investigate the state's financing of public education. The committee issued proposals

aimed to do far more than change teacher salaries, its original purpose, and Perot's conception of educational reform, which equated public education "with an 8.3 billion dollar business" dominated the legislative package which resulted. (Timar & Kirp, 1987, p. 67).

California's comprehensive school reform law, SB 813, was in great part an effort to undo previous reform efforts. This history of legislative involvement in educational reform has encouraged formation of politically experienced and influential constituencies, the state teachers unions and local school boards among them. Passage of legislation to reform the state's schools was intricately negotiated, as Timar and Kirp describe, (1988, pp. 81-95) with no single constituency able to completely dominate. In comparison to the Texas package, SB 813 was less dramatically shaped by corporate leaders. However, their involvement, in the form of recommendations from a study commissioned by the California Business Roundtable, shaped many of the resulting reforms. For instance, the Roundtable criticized the decline in instructional time in many school systems and a fundamental and costly reform of SB 813 was new funding for increased instruction (Timar & Kirp, p. 91).

For the most part, the educational establishment, including the teachers unions, has yielded authority for shaping educational policy in a quid pro quo that has given business and its political allies measures they demanded, in exchange for increased school funding, especially teacher salaries. For

example, although both national teacher unions, the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association, had for well over a decade opposed changes in the salary structure of teaching to link pay to performance, the influence of the new political winds of the Reagan era, the promise of new revenue linked to reform, and the competitive pressures the two rivals exert on each other, were the carrot and stick which prodded them to accept distasteful policies (Urban, 1985). In Texas, the teacher union swallowed its opposition to a minimum competency test in exchange for new tax money applied to education...and salaries (Shepard & Kreitzer, 1985). In Tennessee, the union representing most of the state's teachers accepted a career ladder plan it had previously opposed when passage of the measure seemed the only way to secure the higher salaries, as Albert Shanker, president of the rival union assured Tennessee teachers throughout the state in his speeches on behalf of the measure (Inman, 1985).

One fundamental problem in making educational reform substitute for policies directly aimed at correcting industrial and economic decline is the thorny task of establishing the correlation between the educational attainment of the workforce, industrial productivity, and a society's economic competitiveness. For example, Murnane (1988) cautions that to conclude that "the deterioration in America's schools has been a significant cause of the drop in the productivity growth rate over the past fifteen years...is almost certainly not true."

Although he argues that educational achievements are related to labor productivity, he also notes that an inverse relationship exists: the economy's operation critically dampens the academic achievement of minority students in inner city schools who know they have little chance of finding a well-paying job, even with a high school diploma.

Another analysis of the relationship between competitiveness and productivity all but excludes education's role and fixes the declining ability of U.S. companies to compete in world markets primarily on an overvalued dollar, and secondarily on a low productivity rate connected to low wages (Center for Popular Economics, 1986). This perspective locates responsibility for declining productivity and structural unemployment in the overall economic policy and priorities of the government, rather than on imports or technology, which are the factors generally used to explain the causal relationship between educational reform and economic revitalization.

A corollary to placing responsibility for economic revitalization on schooling is pinning the blame for poverty on poor education. This conceptual framework has been challenged by countless educators from John Dewey (1915) to more modern writers, one of whom succinctly argued that unemployment and poverty are no more caused by education than big feet are caused by large shoes (Eisenberg, 1967), but this viewpoint has been virtually absent from public discourse about the excellence reforms. Some educators have challenged the causal relationship

between educational achievement and economic success so central to the excellence reforms, for instance Kazemak (1988) who turns the relationship on its head and argues that political, not pedagogical, factors fuel the conception that illiteracy causes crime and poverty, a conclusion supported by historical studies demonstrating that higher levels of literacy follow improved political and economic conditions. However, for the most part, criticisms have been leveled at the mechanics of various plans and not the ideological underpinnings of the movement.

RESTRUCTURING THE WORKFORCE

The most popular measures for restructuring schools and teaching also illustrate that educational reform has become the business of business. They are modeled on popular new ideas of business management, most importantly the team concept. The career ladder and master teacher plans adopted or under consideration in 38 states as of 1984, (Timar & Kirp, p. 13) differ in important aspects, but they all connect salary to job performance.

The salary schedule used by virtually all school systems to determine wages is the equivalent of the complex job classification systems established by modern industry in the 1920's and 30's which linked pay to the skill and experience necessary to perform the task and not to the worker. (Lichtenstein, 1988). As Murnane (1985) explains, it is one of three types of employment contracts, and the only, he argues,

that is appropriate to education, because teaching is not characterized by the incentives or working conditions that make other types of work more easily assessed and paid according to performance-based plans.

Performance-based pay plans are frequently described in the language of manufacturing, not surprisingly given their ideological roots in the corporate ethos. For instance, Hawley, (1985) in his discussion of the uses of performance-based pay to inspire school improvement, likens schools to factories: their purpose is to produce student learning and their productivity is determined by the raw materials, technology, and skill used in applying that technology.

In many industries, management is attempting to replace job classification systems with team plans which create "highly desirable new jobs...for selected workers to administer or facilitate the team concept" (Parker & Slaughter, 1988). Master teacher and career ladders accomplish the same end in education: they erode or supplant traditional salary schedules which link pay to years of service and educational attainment and tie compensation to performance, that is, to the worker.

Career ladder plans are usually explained as measures to empower teachers and professionalize the occupation, as well as providing an affordable method of raising teachers' salaries. However, they can be viewed as actually limiting access to governance, since they reward only those who climb the ladder with more pay and more variety in their job. Replacing

traditional salary schedules with career ladders that have quotas on the number or percentage of staff who can attain higher status and pay may actually diminish incentive for professional growth by limiting its rewards to a select few (National Education Association, 1985). Teachers who do not wish to do more than teach have no encouragement to share in school governance under plans which trade extra pay for extra responsibility, and to the extent that pay is linked only to performance, teachers have no financial incentives for furthering their own learning, an encouragement built into traditional salary schedules.

The career ladder and master teacher plans which have been implemented are for the most part variations of the major national proposals; some allow extra-pay for extra work to teachers who demonstrate superior work and competence. While career ladders ameliorate the problem of justifying who receives the increased compensation, blunting one of the most frequent objections to merit pay plans (Cohen & Murnane, 1985) they retain its most harmful structural element, linking pay to job performance. Further, they stratify what has heretofore been an occupation with little internal hierarchy, a condition which Lortie (1975) noted makes teachers more likely to seek assistance from each other and nurtures a cooperative environment in which teachers are more likely to share information about students and effective teaching strategies.

The Holmes group (1986) uses an academic model to

differentiaite in both salary and responsibilities between instructors, professional teachers and career professionals. The Carnegie report proposes four tiers, ranging from licensed teachers, to certified teachers, to those who are advanced certificated holders, and at the top, lead teachers. The National Commission for Excellence in Teacher Education (1985) advocates additional compensation for all teachers who assume various roles and demonstrate their high competence in them. The plan endorsed by the American Federation of Teachers calls for two tiers, of instructors and career teachers who could serve as teacher trainers. It calls for rotation of the teacher trainer positions and is the only national proposal which specifies a practice which would counterbalance the newly codified hierarchies.

In her analysis of the Holmes Group report, Mary Anne Raywid (1987) notes that it "manages the job of splitting up teacher-related functions into..distinct levels of role and status, but it does so at the cost of denying to the two lower levels functions essential to maximal performance!" (p. 414). Similarly, mentoring plans which are part of master teacher arrangements have mutually contradictory elements since the mentors' extra pay is linked to an institutionally superior status, separating the mentors from the teachers they are supposed to assist as colleagues. The mentors' advice "would surely prove more welcome...if the roles were not formalized into two classes of citizens, with yet another tier of superordinates and subordinates" (Raywid, p.416).

By linking pay and performance, career ladder programs may have the inadvertent result of damaging the conditions for collegiality, creating competition among teachers when collaboration and a value on shared work are needed (Little, 1987). Reform measures which attach extra pay to diversification of teachers' job responsibilities imitate a business practice which undermines the values and conditions which encourage development of a school-wide vision and sense of purpose. Ironically the business model of performance-based pay being used to re-fashion teaching is a practice which many lower level managers avoid because it is subjective and divisive and upper echelons eschew because they acknowledge that factors beyond executives' control may contribute to success or failure, the very same reasons it has been opposed historically by teacher unions (Bornfriend, 1985)(National Education Association, 1985).

Implementation of the team concept in business has been as varied as it has been widespread, so generalizations about the model are problematic. Nonetheless, it is interesting to note that the Carnegie Task Force description of a lead teacher corresponds to the team leader in one model dubbed "management by stress" by its critics. In this particular team plan, the team leader is responsible for maintaining the speed of the production line and the quality of the product, sharing with management information workers have learned about the production process (Parker & Slaughter, 1988, p. 20). The Carnegie report calls for lead teachers who will provide active leadership in the

redesign of the schools and in helping their colleagues to uphold high standards of learning and teaching.

Team plans have been endorsed by a range of business and union leaders. The reasons vary, from the team model's ability to boost productivity to the opportunities it opens for democracy in the workplace, the latter being Charles C. Heckscher's contention in The New Unionism: Employee Involvement in the Changing Corporation (1988).

In one of the most comprehensive critical analyses of the team concept and its implementation to date, Parker and Slaughter (1988) contend that when industrial plants are converted to team operation workers have less control over the manufacturing process. This criticism is echoed in the first-person account of an auto worker (Downs, 1988) who describes how the initially enthusiastic workers at a Missouri auto plant opened in 1984 with teams now view it quite differently. The author argues that real participation of workers has not been enhanced and that teams are given a budget and asked to think of ways to cut costs, that is, given responsibility for compromising quality or safety. He complains that workers are not allowed to make decisions on the basis of what is best for the society, for their communities, or for themselves.

In a similar vein, an article in Business Week (Zellner, 1988) reported that with teams the General Motors Toyota plant in Fremont, California has almost doubled production, but even some union members who are proponents of the team organization have

become disillsioned because they feel the reorganization has left workers with less power than before.

The United Auto Workers and its members have accepted team plans because they fear plant closings and want to make the car manufacturers more competitive (Holusha, 1988), in much the same way that teacher unions have accepted career ladders rather than risk losing political battles for increased public funding of education. However, the corporate sector's victory in imposing its image on education may well by pyrrhic, for the evidence grows that even with these reforms, the schools are unable to perform as their corporate bosses demand.

Business leaders may ultimately fail to reform schooling in the image of a successful corporation because education cannot be equated with production nor students, products as long as education is assigned social and political responsibilities in addition to its economic function. As this paper has noted, all of the national reports have highlighted education's economic functions, but they have also acknowledged its social purpose in a democracy, for instance, in demanding schools that "safeguard a free society" as did A Nation at Risk. It is this dual function with which schooling is invested that makes it resistant to complete transformation by the "industrial ideal."

Counterposed to the schooling-as-manufacturing model is the premise that teaching is a moral enterprise worthy of a praise which money cannot buy (P.Jackson, 1985) or that it is specific to each person and situtaion, requiring time and experience for

mastery (Ayers, 1988). In a workshop for teachers who are leaders of local affiliates, the National Education Assocation encourages participants to understand the appeal of career ladders and productivity models but also warns that they threaten to create a test-driven educational system. When student and teacher performance are measured by a single instrument instead of a variety of evaluative tools, both education and equality suffer. Workshop materials warn that "learning increasingly becomes viewed as a quantifiable product with a fixed market value, rather than as a qualitative process with the goal of human development (National Education Association, p.23).

Writing in his education column in The New York Times on December 21, 1988, Edward B. Fiske notes that "it's an open question to what extent business should serve as a model for effective education. As a college president once remarked, 'My board chairman keeps telling me that I should run my college more like a corporation, and I keep wondering which one he has in mind. E.F. Hutton? Continental Illinois? Maybe Eastern Airlines?'"

For the most part, this "open question" of the appropriate role for business in determining educational policy has been unasked and the corporate connection not examined. Even more critical than the legislation which has resulted from corporate domination of both policy formulation and implementation is the absence of public discourse about the social and political values at the core of education's most recent reforms.

Studies of educational policy, whether of implementation and design strategies, like proposals for "backward mapping' (Elmore, 1979), or analysis of alternative policy instruments (McDonnell & Elmore, 1987) or research into the cumulative impact of state policy on local units (Murphy, 1980) help to make educational policy accomplish what it deems to do. But the values underlying policy initiatives need to be made explicit, so that the values themselves can be debated along with the proposals for implementation.

Discussion of the values we have implicitly and explicitly adopted as part of the reform of American education has yet to occur. Its absence from the dimension of reform Timar and Kirp term the "conversation" or the "zeitgeist of reform" (p. 132) partially explains the collapse of momentum for educational reform. In exchange for business support, the educational establishment agreed to make structural changes, but these alterations have not produced the results business expected. As the head of the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston complained, business has lived up to its side of the agreement, but the schools have not (Fiske, 1988), and corporate leaders like Iacocca threaten to find an alternative to public education if their demands are not met:

> In my company, when the customer makes a demand of us we meet it, even if we hve to shake up the whole place. And the product gets better as a result. The thing can happen in the schools if the customers - the people who get the products of those schools - all got together and said 'this is what we want, and if you

don't give it to us we'll find somebody else who will.'

Some corporate leaders have started already to develop their alternative. The New York Times reported that sixteen corporations in Chicago have invested over two million dollars to open a grammar school in a poor West Side neighborhood (Johnson, 1988).

Margaret Haley's prediction about the consequences of corporate domination of public discourse on education has a remarkably prescient and modern ring:

> The responsibility for changing existing conditions so as to make it possible for the public school to do its work rests with the people, the whole people. Any attempt on the part of the public to evade or shift this responsibility must result in weakening the public sense of civic responsibility and the capacity for civic duty, besides further isolating the public school from the people, to the detriment of both...(1904)

It is commonly accepted that public education has indeed become isolated from the people it purports to serve. Unfortunately, the relationship between that isolation and the values embedded in the policies to reform education this decade are far less recognized. Until that connection has been debated and the social and political implications of the corporate connection to these reforms examined, the isolation is likely only to increase. Therein lies one of the most pressing obligations of policy makers, analysts, educators, and citizens.

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